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## **The future development in the Baltic Sea area**

### **A litmus test for European politics**

*Hans-Dietrich Genscher*

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When almost ten years ago the Berlin wall fell and the division of Europe ended, some observers announced the “end of history”. Today we know that these expectations were at least ill-founded. History does never come to an end. In former Yugoslavia we are again witnessing destructive aggressive nationalism and its devastating consequences for peace and stability in Europe. At the same time, however, the peoples of Europe are facing the new challenges of globalisation and a multipolar world.

After the end of World War II the founding of the European Union was the answer to the errors of our past, to aggressive nationalism and to two bloody world wars. The European Communities established a new culture of co-operation, based on joint responsibility, common values and on an equal footing between smaller and larger states. For the first time in their history the nations of Europe had and have the possibility to live their identity without having fear from one another. Never before in European history we experienced such a high degree of stability and prosperity as within the European Union.

With the introduction of the EURO the EU has entered a new phase of its development. For the first time 11 and very soon 15 nations share a common currency. This will have far-reaching consequences also for political integration. Being an Economic world power means more responsibility: for global stability – in economic and political terms. We must assume this responsibility. After the completion of the economic and Monetary Union the deepening of the Political Union and the enlargement of the EU are the strategic tasks of the years to come.

The EU must and will exploit the dynamics of economic and monetary integration for political unification. The entering into force of the Amsterdam Treaty on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1999 was an important step forward. But it must not remain the last one.

Only a European Union which is able to act will assume its responsibility as a global player in a multipolar and globalised world. That requires far-reaching institutional reforms within the EU. We need, for instance, a genuine EU Common Foreign and Security Policy in order to contribute to stability in our neighbouring regions and in the world. The EU must be ready to act when it comes to fighting new global threats such as global warming, international crime and terrorism as well as the proliferations of weapons of mass destruction.

However, deepening the EU does not exclude enlarging the EU. The zone of stability represented by the EU must not be limited to its current borders. On the threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> century we have the unique chance of completing

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the unity of the greater Europe. Only in the framework of a greater Europe we Europeans will be able to prevent new nationalism and to give viable answers to the challenge of globalisation. This requires the enlargement of the European Union to the East and to the South and the establishment of a comprehensive partnership with Russia, the Ukraine and the other CIS-countries.

Today Europe faces a fundamental choice: either we build a new Europe based on cooperation, integration and common values or we are going to embark on the fateful path of power politics – with the well-known terrible results.

The future development in the Baltic Sea area will be a litmus test for European politics, for our ability to follow the logic of interdependence rather than old thinking in terms of power politics. The region from Tallinn to Vilnius has always been a key region for European security and stability. Whether or not the vision of a Europe based on co-operation and without hegemonic ambitions will become reality depends to a considerable degree on the development in the Baltic States and the Baltic Sea Region in general. Here Russia borders on Central Europe: in future the Baltic States will – apart from Finland – form the border between the European Union and Russia. The development in the region since the great turning point at the beginning of this decade is encouraging. On the threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the Baltic Sea is about to become a real “European Sea”. The accession of Finland and Sweden to the EU four years ago was a first decisive step. Today, the accession of Poland as well as the Baltic States Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania is one of the main strategic challenges in the years ahead. They share common values with the other peoples of Europe: human rights, democracy, the rule of law and market economy. Without Poland and the Baltic States the European Union would remain a torso ...

Poland and the Baltic States have made great progress on their way into the European Union. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are consolidated democracies. One can only admire the energy, the moderation and the wisdom Baltic leaders have shown since 1991 in rebuilding democracy and market economy. The Baltic economies are developing dynamically – as do the economies of the other associated countries in Central Europe. In 1998, economic growth in the Baltic States totalled between three and four per cent.

The European Union has acknowledged this encouraging development by starting negotiations on accession last year with five associated countries, amongst them Poland and Estonia. But we are not allowed to stop there. Last autumn the European Commission has reported remarkable progress also in Latvia and Lithuania. The start of negotiations with Latvia and Lithuania, therefore, should follow without any delay. The European Council in Helsinki at the end of this year would be an ideal venue and point in time to take such a decision. The European Union should do its utmost in order to prevent new dividing lines in the Baltic Sea area. It must not jeopardise intra-Baltic co-operation through a different treatment of the Baltic States during the process of enlargement. However, the point in time when the Baltic States could accede to the EU only depends on whether they fulfill the

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political and economic preconditions. I am deeply convinced: the accession of the Baltic States will enhance stability in the whole Baltic Sea area, including Russia.

Security and stability in the Baltic Sea Region will also in future depend on Russia. The developments in Russia affect the rest of Europe. In the age of globalisation it would be even more anachronistic to think Europe again in terms of borders and dividing lines.

Russia, therefore, must be included in, not excluded from the Euro-Atlantic structures. Russia considers the EU as its main partner besides the US, more than 40% of Russia's foreign trade being carried out with the EU. The European Union has acknowledged this fact by concluding an agreement on partnership and co-operation with Russia, the Ukraine, and some other CIS countries. The agreement lays the foundation for a comprehensive co-operation in the political field, in the economic area as well as regarding home and justice affairs. The European Union should do its utmost to exploit all possibilities of co-operation offered by this agreement. It is a particularly encouraging sign that the European Union at the coming European Council at Cologne for the first time will have a Common strategy for Russia. Its main features will be fostering democracy and market economy, co-operation in the field of security and addressing the new threats in Europe. Recent developments in Russia underline the necessity for ever closer co-operation.

It is therefore of paramount importance to offer a European perspective to Russia and the Russian people. In this context I would like to mention two major tasks. First, the European Union should intensify its efforts in order to establish a pan-European infrastructure in the fields of energy, telecommunication, and transport. Secondly, we should tackle now the establishment of a pan-European free trade zone including Russia.

The EU and Russia still have a long way to go until we have established a pan-European economic zone from the Atlantic to Vladivostok. But we need a vision which binds the peoples of Europe together. The more we follow the logic of interdependence, the more old thinking in terms of balance of power will become obsolete and the closer we get to our aim of a just and stable peace order for the whole of Europe.

The Europe of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will also be a Europe of the regions. This is being demonstrated also by the development in the Baltic Sea Region. The outlook for the Baltic Sea Region has never been as positive as today.

German unification, the revolutionary changes in Russia, the new democratic Poland, the re-establishment of the independence of the Baltic States and finally EU-membership of Finland and Sweden have fundamentally changed the situation in this area. For the first time in their history the nations around the Baltic Sea share the same principles: democracy, human rights and market economy. After the end of the Cold War the peoples around the Baltic Sea have rediscovered their common cultural heritage. The Baltic Sea Region has the chance to become a European area of economic growth: trade in the region is increasing by 20 percent per year.

The people around the Baltic Sea know: only together they can tackle the

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great challenges of the Baltic Sea Region successfully: the establishment of a working regional infrastructure in the areas of telecommunication, transport and energy, fighting organised crime, protecting the environment, improving nuclear safety and strengthening security. This requires joint action – by the national governments and by the regions around the Baltic Sea.

Only through common action they can overcome the still destabilising economic inequality in the region and establish a stability-oriented network of co-operation in all areas. It is the responsibility of the European Union to make a significant contribution to co-operation and integration in the Baltic Sea area. The Baltic Sea does not deserve less attention and engagement than the Mediterranean Sea. The EU-commission, therefore, has rightfully taken the initiative for a “Baltic Sea Region Initiative” providing support within the framework of existing programmes.

Besides the European Union in future also the Council of the Baltic Sea States will play an important role for the development of the region. Since its founding in 1992 the Council of the Baltic Sea States – my friend Uffe Ellemann-Jensen and I have particularly good memories regarding this event – it has become an effective and flexible instrument of regional co-operation and political dialogue.

The Riga summit of the Baltic Sea Heads of Government in January 1998 underlined the importance all Baltic governments attach to Baltic Sea co-operation. Over the last years the Council of the Baltic Sea States has proved to be an efficient moderator and co-ordinator of Baltic Sea co-operation. The “Euro-faculties” at the universities of Tartu, Riga, Vilnius and Kaliningrad are only one example for this.

It is important to include Russia in the Baltic Sea co-operation. That applies in particular to those Russian regions which border directly on the Baltic Sea, such as the areas of St. Petersburg and Kaliningrad. The EU must make clear to Russia that it will benefit from having the EU as its direct neighbour. Russia itself has recognised the increasing importance of Baltic Sea co-operation by making proposals for enhancing co-operation in the field of business, environmental protection, combat of crime and improvement of the regional infrastructure.

Security and stability in the Baltic Sea Region will also in future depend to a great extent on relations between Russia and the Baltic States. Since 1991 Russia and the Baltic States have made remarkable progress in this respect.

Finland has given another encouraging example for a future-oriented approach towards relations with Russia with its proposal for a “Northern Dimension” of the European Union. Indeed, the European Union must not forget the North and North-East of our continent. In North-Eastern Europe the interests of the EU and of Russia converge visibly. The EU, therefore, has adopted conclusions on a Northern Initiative at the European Council in Vienna. Its priorities are fostering trade, combating organized crime and tackling environmental questions. These tasks must be tackled now without any further delay.

Baltic Sea co-operation is not a task for national governments only. It will

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only be successful if the people around the Baltic Sea come together. The 21<sup>st</sup> century will be – like no other century before – an era of almost unlimited information and communication. We need a “people to people-dialogue” around the Baltic Sea. The first steps have been made. The great tradition of the “Hanse” is still alive. It is an encouraging sign that regions and cities in the Baltic Sea Region are developing an impressive network of regional co-operation. Germany, for instance, has put great emphasis on the inclusion of the coastal regions of Schleswig-Holstein and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern as well as Hamburg in the Council of the Baltic Sea States.

The EU will be a pillar of democracy, stability and security in the whole of Europe and in the Baltic Sea Region in particular. However, we should not forget: we will not be able to achieve the goal of a just and stable peace order for the whole of Europe without the United States of America. Our century's history teaches us that lasting peace in Europe can only be guaranteed through the sustained involvement of the USA in Europe. We must, therefore, not dismantle but strengthen the transatlantic ties, first of all the Euro-Atlantic security structures, NATO and OSCE. They must play their role when it comes to establishing a viable security architecture for the Baltic Sea Region as part of a pan-European security architecture.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was a century of hitherto unknown violence, of destruction and totalitarian ideologies. The peoples around the Baltic Sea have experienced this in particular. Today, after two world wars and after the end of the Cold War, the peoples of Europe know that they belong together. This is all the more so in the age of globalisation. It is our joint responsibility to build a Europe whole and free. Never before in European history the prospects for a lasting and just peace order were so bright as today. History does not repeat its offers. Let us grasp this historic opportunity – with courage and determination.

*Rede auf dem Baltic Development Forum in Kopenhagen am 17.05.99*